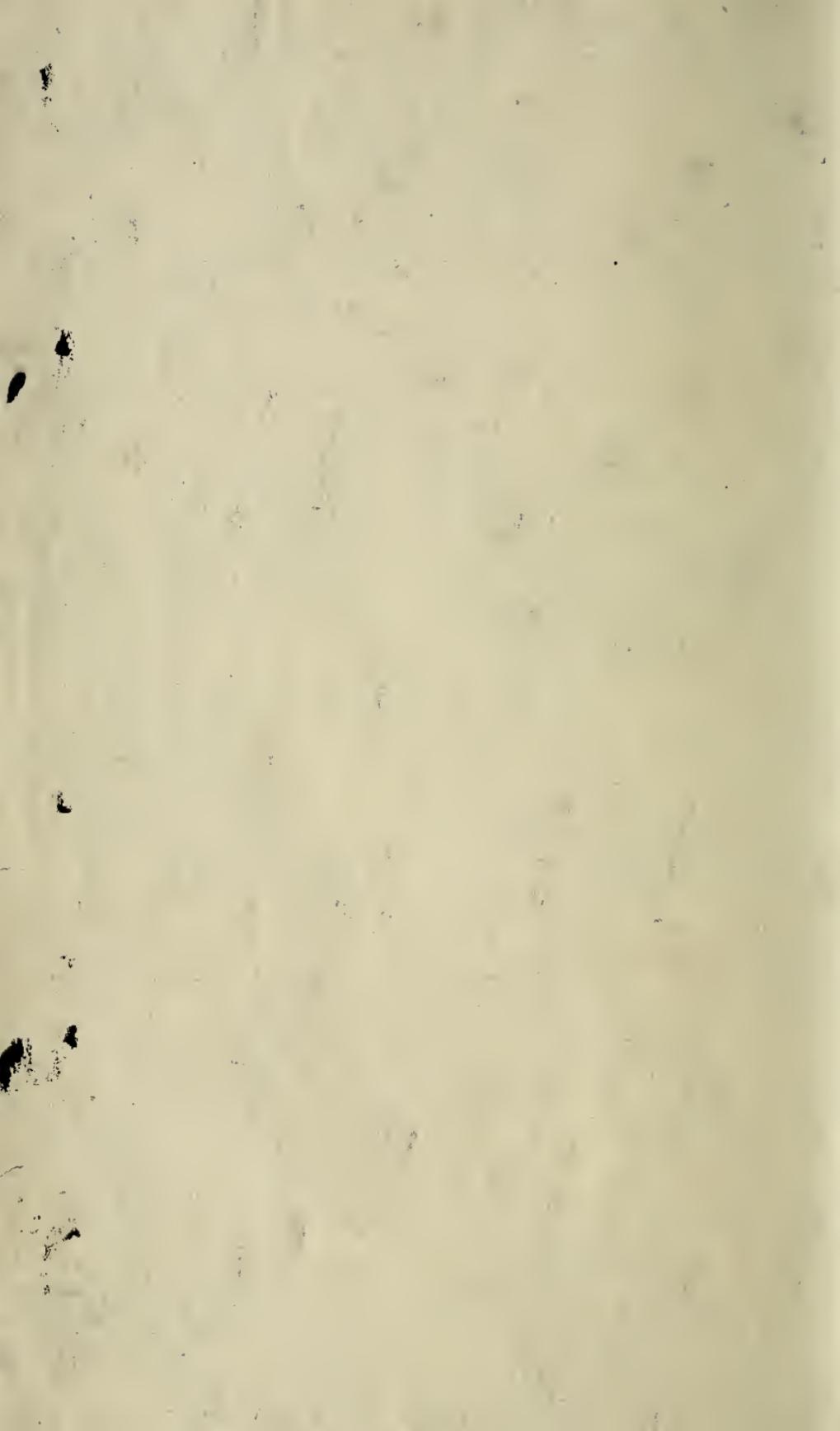


Our Martyred President.



Our Martyred President.

A DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

PRESIDENT LINCOLN,

PREACHED IN STILLWATER, N. Y.,

April 16th, 1865,

BY REV. WILLIAM M. JOHNSON.

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STILLWATER, N. Y., APRIL 22d, 1865.

TO REV. WM. M. JOHNSON, *Pastor of the Presbyterian Church*:

Dear Sir :—The undersigned, participating in the national sorrow that overwhelms all loyal hearts, in view of the awful calamity that has befallen our Republic in the death (by assassination) of its great and good President, Abraham Lincoln ; and desiring often to recall his shining virtues and his patriotic deeds, his integrity of purpose and great wisdom in promoting the welfare of the country in whose service he has fallen ;—having listened to your discourse on the solemn Sabbath following this sad event, do hereby request the manuscript for publication, and preservation in a more permanent form.

Very truly yours,

REUBEN WESCOTT,
SAMUEL G. EDDY,
E. K. WOOLSEY,
WM. M. BARTLETT,
JARED W. HAIGHT,
LYMAN DWIGHT,
PETER SCHOONMAKER,

E. WIDDEMER.
C. D. BULL,
G. V. LANSING,
EGBERT GARDNER,
LYMAN TUCKER,
G. N. BENTON,
A. W. GREY,



STILLWATER, N. Y., APRIL 24th, 1865.

TO REUBEN WESCOTT, E. WIDDEMER, S. G. EDDY, E. K. WOOLSEY, C. D. BULL,
G. V. LANSING, and others :

Gentlemen :—I herewith transmit to you the manuscript of which you speak.

Yours, in the bonds of Christian patriotism,

WM. M. JOHNSON.

DISCOURSE.

II SAMUEL, 1: 19. “The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places : how are the mighty fallen !”

“ Death loves a shining mark, a signal blow ;
A blow, which, while it executes, alarms ;
And startles thousands with a single fall.”

All loyal hearts beat sadly and slowly to-day. The nation is draped in mourning. We had not yet grown calm from the excitement of victory and triumph, we were just highly elated with the prospect of peace, when once more darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. The sun has gone down while it was yet day. The toll of the death-bell follows the peal of victory. For “the beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places : how are the mighty fallen. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon ; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings ; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away.” The wail of a great people ascends to heaven. And the mournful cadences of the bereaved king of Israel can but feebly express the agony of our hearts.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, the merciful Conqueror, the pure Patriot, the Idol of the people, the Chief Magistrate of the nation, is dead. And this, too, is greatly aggravated by the fact, that the hand of a vile assassin dealt him the murderous blow, and that one so gentle, so tender of others, should be a martyr through inhuman revenge. Had he died by ordinary disease, in the regular course of God’s providence, we could have readily said, “It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good.” But

now, though we would still recognize God's permissive decree in this "sum of all villainies," the blow to us is awfully severe, and ordinary consolation affords but little relief. It is a solemn hour, and it is a solemn service to reflect upon the sad event. We feel that "the Republic has lost its truest friend, its great protector, its trusted savior." Next to the Almighty Arm, we have placed confidence in him. The voice of calumny has never dared to question his love for his country. He loved her with the instinctive and unreserved devotion of a child for its mother. Possessed of a giant manhood, and the sagacity of astute statesmanship, and with abundant opportunity to exercise both, he has left this record, *he has done what he could.* Great was the task which he was called to perform. He was taken quite unexpectedly from his quiet home near the Father of Waters, he was placed in a new position, he was met by every form of perplexity and embarrassment; but his brave heart avoided no responsibility, he paled at no opposition, he stumbled at no obstacle. In March, 1861, he took a solemn oath to sustain the constitution and the laws, and nobly did he keep his vow, till the hand of the assassin deprived him of his life. We have believed from the first that he was raised up, and schooled, and endowed by Providence, to meet the emergency of the times. Again and again has it appeared that God was with him. Again and again, when hope was almost gone, have we turned to him, as an instrument in the hands of the King of Kings, to save us from utter destruction. From this sacred desk the prayer has often gone up, that God would keep him in the hollow of His hand, would shield him from all danger, and keep his mind firm and his heart pure. Those prayers have been all answered by a covenant-keeping God till now—*till now* He seems to turn away His face from us in this great national bereavement. "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was a man of the people, from the people, and among the people. We never could have loved a titled aristocrat, a man who boasted of his blood, as we have loved him. All his antecedents, all his speeches, all his public acts,

indeed his whole course from boyhood up to the day of his death, placed him in sympathy with the people. Let us glance briefly at his life.

He was born in Hardin county, Kentucky, (which is now included in Larue county) Feb. 12th, 1809, and was therefore at his death fifty-six years of age. The name is English, and his ancestors were co-laborers with William Penn, in settling the State of Pennsylvania. They belonged to the Society of Friends. Emigration was then as rife as now. The new country offered so many inducements to settlers, that only a few remained in their first location. Branches of the Lincoln family removed to Virginia, to Kentucky, to Indiana, and finally to Illinois. The grandfather of our lamented President fell a victim to the savage ferocity of the Indians in one of the new settlements. His father and mother were both born in Virginia, but in 1816 removed with their family to the then distant West. Like most of the pioneers in the new country, they engaged in agricultural pursuits, and here our Chieftain grew up to manhood. There were then no advantages for education in the West, as now, and he only obtained snatches of learning, amounting in the aggregate to less than a year, and with such helps as *our* young people would hardly think worthy of mention. His own account of his mental training was substantially as follows: It is true, I never went to school much. But I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I don't think I ever got angry at anything else in my life. I can remember going to my little bed-room, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down, and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings. I could not sleep, though I often tried to, when I got on such a hunt after an idea, until I had caught it. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me. Years after, when I commenced the study of law, I constantly came upon the word *demonstrate*. I soon became satisfied that I did not

understand its meaning. I said to myself, “ What do I do when I demonstrate more than when I reason or prose ? ” I threw down my law books, left my situation in Springfield, went home to my father’s house, and staid there till I could give any proposition in the six books of Euclid at sight. Then I returned to my law books, satisfied that I knew the meaning of *demonstrate*. And that is the extent of my education.

After leaving his father, and before taking up the study of law, he was variously employed—building boats, sailing on the Mississippi, trading, and such like. He was captain of a company of volunteers in the Black Hawk war. He was ready for anything, and efficient in everything. Finally he became postmaster of a small town, and in the interval of mailing and delivering letters, but mostly in the night, he commenced to prepare for the legal profession, borrowing his books in the evening and returning them in the morning. From this point he began rapidly to rise. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. He bore a heavy one, and experienced all the beneficial effects. In 1834, '36, '38 and '40, he was elected to the legislature of Illinois, and first took his seat with that body two years before he had license to practise law. In 1847, when he was 38 years of age, he became a representative in the National Legislature, and two years after he was the author of a scheme which was to abolish slavery in the district of Columbia. But he only saw his plan consummated after it had been maturing fifteen years, and when he was serving his first term as President of the United States.

He first attracted the special attention of the entire nation in his memorable contest with the gifted Douglas, during the summer of 1858. Day after day, in the presence of large assemblies, these two giants received and parried each other’s blows, as only they could do, both displaying eminent ability, and at the same time preserving that dignity in debate which is the mark of noble minds. Some time in the winter of 1859, he came to New York, where he spoke before the first men of the country, in such a manner that all began to forecast his high

destiny. Subsequently he spoke in many of the New England cities, the people everywhere crowding to hear him as if he were an oracle, and reading his speeches with the greatest eagerness. One little incident which occurred while he was in Connecticut will serve better than anything else I can say, to show what manner of man he was. After speaking one evening to a large audience, and closing his remarks with these noble words : “Gentlemen, it has been said of the world’s history, hitherto, that *might makes right*; it is for us and for our times to reverse the maxim, and to show that *right makes might*;” he was standing the next morning at the railroad depot, waiting for the train to bear him to the next town, when a clergyman came up and was introduced to him. “Ah,” said he, “I have seen you before.” The minister said he thought not. He replied, “I have seen you; you were at the meeting last night, and I saw you there.” The surprised inquiry then was, “Is it possible that you could observe individuals so closely in such a crowd?” “Oh yes,” said he, “that is my way. I generally look around when I am speaking, and I do not forget faces.” That was enough to stagger the most credulous. But it showed the mighty intellectual power of the man. To speak extemporaneously at all, acceptably, is a great thing. But to speak to thousands of strangers, and at the same time be studying and fixing their faces, is a gift which nature has not often bestowed upon man.

In the May following this, he was nominated in Chicago for the Presidency, to succeed James Buchanan; and though in the election there were three opposing candidates, he was successful. But the hour of his triumph was only the precursor of his peril and his trial. That day, when the news of his election was received in Charleston, the first ordinance of secession was decreeed. And he was hardly seated in the Presidential chair, before the slaveholders’ rebellion was fairly inaugurated. Even his first passage to the capital was obstructed, and only the good hand of Providence saved him from assassination then. God spared him for long and toilsome service, and for a harder fate. I say *a harder fate*, for then we scarcely dared to hope; but now when

he is taken from us, our whole sky is illuminated with the bright omens of better times, and we were all preparing to thank God for a united, peaceful, and regenerated Republic.

His first term of administration was probably more difficult than any that our Presidents have passed through. The country did not fully know him yet, but we *did* know that the greatest prudence and wisdom were necessary to save us from irretrievable ruin. The South was already in arms and prepared for war, while the North was crippled on every side. False men in the government had carefully prepared everything for the success of the rebellion. With empty hands, and an empty treasury, with no navy and no army, with mighty foes arrayed before him, and masked batteries in his rear, our noble President went to work. We prayed that the God of nations would help him, but we looked on trembling for the result. Now that he has served us so long and so well, and while his body is preparing for the tomb, we look back and marvel to see what God hath wrought through him.

He called around him an efficient cabinet, the first and ablest of whom, has now, like him, been made the victim of barbaric revenge. The sagacity of Lincoln and the diplomacy of Seward, have been, under God, the salvation of the government.

The next business after selecting his Cabinet, was to organize an army, and engage in war against an enemy of our own blood. It was his to subdue a rebellious household. His first proclamation did not come up to the expectation of loyal hearts. But we hoped he would do better, and he did. Gradually he grasped the whole condition of affairs. If he thought at first that seventy-five thousand men could suppress the rebellion, he thought just as thousands more in the North thought and spoke. He was never hasty, never precipitate ; but, on the other hand, a calm review of his whole administration plainly shows he was never dilatory, never too late.

His first order was to reinforce Sumter, beleaguered by thousands of rebels. In that, he was as careful as he was determined. Not one word was said by him, then, or after, to arouse

the least resistance in the Southern heart. The closing words of his first inaugural plainly foreshadowed his future policy. He said then, addressing the traitors from the steps of the Capitol : “ In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave, to every living heart in this broad land, will swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.” Solemn and prophetic words ! That oath registered in heaven never was violated. But he scarcely lived to hear the “ chorus of the Union” which was just beginning to ascend from millions of enraptured hearts.

Seventy-five thousand men, undisciplined in the art of war, were insufficient to quell the most gigantic rebellion the world has ever seen. He soon called for more volunteers, and then for more, till the popular song announced our readiness to furnish all that were necessary. “ Father Abraham,” it said. Yes, that was the spontaneous response, which we soon learned to make to his appeals. He had been trained in the wilderness of the West ; he was uncouth in manners, and unpolished in speech ; but before he had been two years our Chief Magistrate we loved him as a man, we reverenced him as a father. That father, we, the bereaved family, mourn as dead to-day. We drape our sanctuary with the symbols of our grief, and looking up to God we try to say, while tears choke our utterance, “ Father in heaven, thy will be done.”

Perhaps the hardest task he had to do, was to obtain the proper leaders for the armies. Winfield Scott was Lieutenant-General, but in his dotage. Events soon demonstrated that *he* had not strength adequate to the occasion. Some of our most gifted military men had proved false to the hand that nourished them, to the government that had munificently endowed them with accomplishments and skill. One man was tried, and then another. Each had his friends, clamorous for his promotion or

retention in office. But the President so skillfully and so kindly treated them all as to lose the respect of none, and to win the love of many. Every one of these generals, including his political opponents, will mourn the loss to the country, and will applaud the virtues of the man. Ah yes! the sorrow is universal now. Even many who opposed Mr. Lincoln while living, now seem to be loudest in lamenting his death, and deplored the great national calamity.

“ Brief, brave and glorious was his bright career,—
 His mourners were two hosts, his friends and foes ;
 For he was Freedom’s Champion,—one of those,
 The few in number, who had not o’erstept
 The charter to chastise which she bestows
 On such as wield her weapons : he had kept
 The whiteness of his soul, and thus men o’er him wept.”

Towards the rebellion, Mr. Lincoln never manifested anything like spite or ill-nature. He accepted it as his commission from God to quell it. This work he set himself deliberately to perform. But he exhibited no spirit of revenge. He had not the savage atrocity of the tyrant. The assassin who shot him leaped from the box upon the stage, and waving his dagger exclaimed, “ *Sic semper tyrannis,*”—*So may it always be with tyrants.* But that grossly belies him. The inhuman traitor added insult to cruelty. Just the opposite spirit possessed the breast of the murdered man. He was kind and lenient, almost to a fault. His subordinates may have been unjust, but he never was. His heart was as tender as a woman’s. Thus he united in his character the qualities of true nobility. He was manly, but gentle ; he was brave, but compassionate ; he was strong enough to rule, but pitiful enough to weep. He lacked the finished accomplishments of Washington, but in the positive qualities of his character, he was in no respect inferior to the Father of his Country. Washington blended in himself all the virtues of the old-time heroes ; Lincoln reproduced the same virtues in beautiful symmetry of character, and made all subservient to the best interests of his country.

The great moral event of his career was the *Proclamation of Emancipation*. All parties had begun to desire that the great evil of slavery might be plucked up by the roots. But many feared the time had not yet come. With eagle eye he discerned the auspicious moment, and proclaimed the dawn of universal liberty ; throwing, however, the whole responsibility upon the traitors in arms. If they returned to their allegiance, as the cause of absolute justice demanded, he would not interfere with their domestic institutions ; otherwise human bondage was at an end. The die was cast. The rebels, with mad faith in an unrighteous cause, persisted in their chosen course, and a just God visited upon them his holy retribution. Congress soon affixed its sanction to the merciful decree, and the loyal part of the nation to-day, both North and South, rejoices in the triumphs of Liberty. Oh ! America, thou knowest not the debt thou owest to the departed hero. The prisoner goes free ; the clanking of chains will be heard no more in thy land. Freedom is the watchword now, and the Goddess of Liberty, with her mild sceptre, will soon rule the world. But the merciful heart has stopped its beating, and the pitying eye is glazed in death. Ichabod, Ichabod, the glory is departed. But he is *not* dead. His name, his works, his spirit, still live. Embalmed in the memory of a grateful people, we will write his name high up by the side of Washington, and with subdued thanksgiving repeat his story to our children's children. Let him sleep on. The peace of death will be to him as tranquil as the peace he has wrought out for the nation. He died in obtaining what we live to enjoy. Let his failures be entombed with his inanimate body, and only his virtues remembered by his bereaved country. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors ; and their works do follow them."

Our martyred President was a Christian. The following incident is well authenticated : A pious gentleman called at the executive mansion on business. This being transacted, just as he was leaving, he turned to Mr. Lincoln and said : " My dear

sir, I wish to ask you one question. When I left home on this mission, my friends charged me to inquire of you, *if you loved Jesus.*" This touched a tender chord. The President's eyes filled with tears, and for a moment he was silent. Then he said : "When I came to Washington, I was not a Christian. When our little boy was taken from us, I was not a Christian. But when I went to the battle-field of Antietam, and passed among the dead and dying of our brave volunteers, then I became a Christian. *Yes, I do love Jesus.*"

This satisfies the religious sentiment of the land. In him *we* lose a friend and brother. But though our sorrow is deep to-day, we sorrow not without hope. He has passed from a noble service on earth, to the nobler services of heaven. He was taken away from his earthly reward, only to receive a crown that shall never fade away. He was taken from the midst of his usefulness, and in full vigor, only to be a brighter trophy in heaven. Had he been less our idol, had he been less worthy, had he been less noble, had he been less prepared, God might have spared him to us. Had we been more worthy of him, had we sustained him better, had we been more careful to guard him, perhaps he might have been spared to us. But oh ! no. The appointed time had come, and an inscrutable Providence permitted the assassin to take his life. It is too late now to say that he ought not to have gone out unguarded. It was his way. We all trembled when he went to Richmond. But there he was not harmed. This proves to us his personal bravery on the one hand, and his confidence in his fellow-citizens on the other. He was spared in Richmond, only to return to the Capital to die by the hand of violence. "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Here we stop, not striving to fathom the depths of Providence. "We are dumb with silence before God. We hold our peace, even from good, and our sorrow is stirred."

In this calamitous event, God speaks to us with an awful voice. And what are the lessons of the hour ?

The first lesson is this : "Put not your trust in princes, nor

in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth ; in that very day his thoughts perish.” The arm of man is a frail support. Trusting to this, we lean upon a broken reed. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.” We feel the force of these Scriptures now, more clearly than ever before. Perhaps we were inclined to hero-worship. Perhaps we were inclined to exalt the man above the Almighty Supporter. Never since the days of Washington, has this nation had so much faith in any one man as in Abraham Lincoln. His friends and foes alike knew that he was honest. And we gave him our implicit trust. But if we have transferred our faith in God to him, now we must receive the Divine rebuke. Here, then, warned in a manner we cannot mistake, we fix our resolve. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses ; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.”

Once more, in this calamity we are taught, as God has taught us in the past, that he alone decides the destinies of nations. “Promotion cometh neither from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South. But God is the Judge : he putteth down one and setteth up another.” “Be still, and know that I am God.” Thou Sovereign of the Universe, teach us in sadness to recognize thy Supreme Authority. Now we commit our way unto God, trusting that he will direct our steps.

My fellow-citizens, shall we stop a moment before we separate, to forecast the future ? to ask what next ? The helm of government is already in untried hands. Does the new pilot know the shoals ? Will he weather the gale ? These are the questions that now burden the national heart. We turn from the dead President to the living, and ask what is to be. Ah ! there we are at fault again. Let us turn unto God. From our lost hope, already far beyond recall, we turn our eyes heavenward, and, thanking God for the departed hero, for his noble life, for his kind and honest heart, for his manly words, for his Christian faith, and that we were blessed by his services so long ;

—we also pray to the same Sovereign Ruler, that He will take the new President under His special care, that He will guard his life from danger, that He will keep his heart from corruption, his mind firm, and his arm strong ; and that our national life may yet be spared, peace inaugurated, and we become a people accepted and blessed of God—a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

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